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SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS\\_KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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- [11. Mideast](#)
- [12. Iraq](#)
- [13. Israel-Turkey Relations](#)

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Key stories in the media:  
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Maariv and Yediot highlighted issues related to the opposition to the disengagement plan. Maariv bannered a call by PM Sharon on IDF soldiers to resist protesters and not to let them "slap you in the face." Sharon was visiting a paratrooper battalion that had participated in the evacuation of two caravans in a settler outpost near Yitzhar on Monday. (All media reported that an IDF conscript from Yitzhar who disrupted the evacuation was tried on disciplinary charges Wednesday and sentenced to 28 days in a military stockade.) Yediot reported that four battalion commanders and 30 commanders in an IDF reserves unit have signed a letter calling for massive refusal to enlist in the evacuation of settlements. Israel Radio and leading Israeli web sites reported that Thursday IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon summoned the members of group, saying he will summarily kick them out of the military if they do not rescind their threats. Ha'aretz, Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio reported that Wednesday A-G Menachem Mazuz ordered police to launch an investigation against the head of the West Bank's Kedumim Regional Council, Daniella Weiss, as well as the founder of the far-right Defensive Shield organization, Noam Livnat (the brother of Education Minister Limor Livnat, who told Israel Radio that although she opposes the evacuation of settlements, she does not support disobedience by soldiers), who are suspected of inciting soldiers to evade their duty and disobey orders. Israel Radio says that they are not likely to be indicted.

All media (banners in Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post) reported that United Torah Judaism (UTJ) has decided that it will join the coalition for a three-month trial period, after Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, the spiritual leader of Degel Hatorah, a key faction of the party, gave his consent to the deal on Wednesday. According to Israel Radio, the new government is likely to be sworn in on Monday.

Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), the leading contender for PA chairmanship, was quoted as saying in an interview with Maariv, whose tone was conciliatory, that he will "make order" in the PA after being elected. Abbas was quoted as saying that he is not afraid of Hamas, only of Allah, that now is an excellent time for peace, and that he will move the road map forward. A senior PA official in Ramallah was quoted in an interview with Jerusalem Post as saying that the PA could launch a "Fallujah-style" operation against Hamas and its supporters if the movement continues its verbal offensive against Abbas. Leading media reported that Wednesday the Fatah Central Committee officially called on Hamas to stop firing rockets and cease the incitement against Abbas, saying that the rocket attacks provide an excuse for continued IDF activity in the Gaza Strip.

Ha'aretz cited an announcement by the State Department Wednesday that Senators John Sununu (R-NH) and Joe Biden (D-DE) will head the official U.S. observer team monitoring the Palestinian elections. The delegation will also include a number of U.S. representatives and

American public figures of Palestinian origin, such as George Salem and Ziad Assali, and will be accompanied by U.S. Consul-General in Jerusalem David Pearce. Michel Rocard, head of the EU's 260-person election monitoring team, was quoted as saying in an interview with Jerusalem Post that one properly run election may not make a democracy, but that is a good place to begin.

Israel Radio reported that this morning IDF troops killed a terrorist who infiltrated the greenhouses of the Ganei Tal settlement in the Gaza Strip's Katif Bloc.

All media reported that Wednesday the State Department released a new report to Congress -- the "Report on Global Anti-Semitism" mandated by President Bush in October. Jerusalem Post notes that the report says that a combination of traditional anti-Jewish prejudice, strong anti-Israel sentiment, and Europe's growing Muslim population has contributed to a recent rise in global anti-Semitism. Leading media write that the report adopts the position that demonization of Israel or comparison of Israeli leaders to Nazis is not legitimate criticism but rather anti-Semitism.

Ha'aretz quoted GOI sources as saying that a "highly classified problem" was the reason for a special meeting Sharon convened earlier this week on the crisis in Israel's relations with Russia, with the participation of FM Silvan Shalom, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, the heads of the intelligence agencies, and a few civil servants. The newspaper quoted the sources as saying that the information given to the media after the meeting -- that Israel is worried by recent statements of an anti-Semitic nature made by President Vladimir Putin -- was partial and tendentious, and that it was aimed at concealing the real reason for the crisis, which Sharon insisted be kept secret.

Ha'aretz reported that Education Ministry D-G Ronit Tirosh has announced that the position held by a Shin Bet representative charged with carrying out background checks on teachers and principals in the Israeli Arab education system is being done away with.

Akiva Eldar of Ha'aretz describes Israeli-Palestinian talks that took place at various Israeli locations from February 2004 until the end of the year, at which point they ended with a concluding document that was released after Arafat's death. IPCRI (the Israeli/Palestine Center for Research and Information) participated in the talks.

Leading media reported that National Union MK Aryeh Eldad has demanded that the A-G bar Abbas from entering Jerusalem because the Palestinian leader published a book in 1984 denying the Holocaust. Eldad said that a recent amendment to the penal code allowed putting Holocaust deniers on trial.

Yediot reported that the Knesset has passed, 43-16, a decision memorializing the heritage of Rehavam Zeevi (a.k.a. Gandhi), the minister assassinated by PFLP gunmen in October 2001, who had advocated the idea of transfers of Arabs from Israel. The newspaper cited the response of former Labor Party leader, MK Amram Mitzna, that the vote represented a cheapening of the concept of commemoration.

Ha'aretz noted that Israel is ranked 33rd in that Wall Street Journal-Heritage Foundation Worldwide Index of Economic Freedom, which evaluated 155 countries.

Ha'aretz reported that 82 UN member states have so far responded to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's appeal to hold a special session in the General Assembly to mark the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

Citing statements by police that there is a huge improvement in the enforcement of IPR-related laws in Israel, Yediot ran a feature on the distribution of counterfeit products in Israel. The newspaper notes that punishing measures are ineffective.

Erratum: Ha'aretz printed corrected graphics of poll results from Tel Aviv University's December Peace Index, which appeared in the newspaper on Wednesday. The figures should read:  
- "Do right-wing soldiers have the right to refuse service in the territories?" No: 68 percent; yes: 27 percent; 5 percent are undecided.  
- "Do left-wing soldiers have the right to refuse service in the territories?" No: 76 percent; yes: 18 percent; 5 percent are undecided.

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**I1. Mideast:**  
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Summary:  
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Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (January 6): "The basic premise of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's latest political move, i.e. that the ultra-Orthodox circles will lend a hand to his disengagement initiative ... has proven itself."

Liberal columnist Yehuda Litani wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "All sides -- Israelis, Palestinians, Americans, and others -- expect significant changes to happen in the Palestinian Authority in the wake of the elections... [But Mahmoud Abbas] is likely to fail."

Block Quotes:  
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**I1. "Ultra-Orthodox Part From Greater Israel"**

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (January 6): "The basic premise of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's latest political move, i.e. that the ultra-Orthodox circles will lend a hand to his disengagement initiative -- if they only receive in return Shinui's removal from the government -- has proven itself. Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv permitted the United Torah Judaism (UTJ) faction last night to join Sharon's new disengagement coalition.... From a foreign policy standpoint, the position taken by the leaders of ultra-Orthodox Jewry is clear: in favor of the withdrawal from Gaza and evacuation of all its settlements.... In the last generation ... nationalistic opinions have [actually] heightened among the young ultra-Orthodox generation.... After the PA elections and the beginning of negotiations between Sharon and Abu Mazen, [Shas party mentor] Rabbi Ovadia [Yosef] will also find reasons to cancel the ruling against the withdrawal, since this will no longer be a 'unilateral' move but rather a 'consensual' one. In the space of less than a year, then, Sharon has succeeded in causing an earthquake in the Israeli right wing.... The government that stands to be presented to the Knesset next week is far from perfect.... Sharon does not have all the time in the world. In the coming months, which will be critical for his plan, his vision and the country's future, he must focus on one sole issue: disengagement.... Sharon is now a prime minister leading a government made up of parties with no love lost between them, and the only adhesive binding them together is the faith they have in his withdrawal vision. Any move that may jeopardize this coalition can and must be deferred."

**II. "There's No Void Around Abu Mazen"**

Liberal columnist Yehuda Litani wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (January 6): "All sides -- Israelis, Palestinians, Americans, and others -- expect significant changes to happen in the Palestinian Authority in the wake of the elections. Even for a charismatic leader such as Arafat, who, as PA chairman, earned support -- albeit reserved -- from all factions of the Palestinian people, this had been an arduous task. Abu Mazen does not enjoy such support.... He is likely to fail. How can he put an end to the violence when various factions of the Fatah organization he heads are disobedient and refuse to dismantle their weapons?.... Regarding the presence of the IDF in Palestinian population centers, and the continuation of the settlements, Abu Mazen will be totally dependent on Israel -- at this stage, there's no sign of willingness for a change. As regards corruption, Mahmoud Abbas is part and parcel of the PLO-Tunisia establishment that is now working to have him elected.... It looks as though the optimism currently surrounding the election campaign will dissipate quickly: Palestinian violence will go on, the IDF will continue to rule the Palestinians heavy-handedly, and the situation of corruption won't improve. An accusing finger will be pointed at Abu Mazen, who believes he can rescue his nation from the impasse in which it find

itself. He is not aware that that he will actually be elected as a sacrificial lamb."

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**12. Iraq:**  
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Summary:  
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Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "It is time for the Americans to understand that in the Syrian case, severe reprimands will not be enough. Even sanctions will not do."

Block Quotes:  
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"It Is Time for the Americans to Understand"

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (January 6): "The Americans are slowly losing their illusions regarding Syrian President Bashar Assad. After four years, he appears in their eyes not as a great hope but as a bitter disappointment and even a threat.... Just as Hafez Assad undermined Lebanon's internal stability from the outside and encouraged terror and violence to the point of civil war there, the Syrians are now trying to do the same in their eastern neighbor, formerly their fierce contender for regional hegemony.... In light of Iraq's historical standing in the Middle East, elections in this country are expected to have a dramatic effect on the future of democracy and the regimes in the entire Middle East. For the sake of this critically important experiment, for the sake of unfortunate Iraq, and what is no less important for the Americans, for the sake of their downtrodden soldiers, it is time for the Americans to understand that in the Syrian case, severe reprimands will not be enough. Even sanctions will not do."

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**13. Israel-Turkey Relations:**  
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Summary:  
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Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "The erroneous approach that has thus far guided Jerusalem is that Turkey needs Israel, due to the latter's ties with Washington, more than Israel needs Turkey."

Block Quotes:  
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"A Test of Friendly Relations"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (January 6): "The chill that has characterized Turkey's official relations with Israel thawed this week when, for the first time in two years, Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul agreed to visit here. It is hoped that in the wake of this visit, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's promise to visit Israel will also be fulfilled.... Turkey is the only Muslim state whose relationship with Israel has popular, economic and security dimensions.... The bilateral relationship is therefore a mutual strategic asset that requires continuous mutual nurturing, and Turkey can cushion the path of diplomatic talks if Israel allows it to do so. Israel, however, has taken this relationship for granted. The erroneous approach that has thus far guided Jerusalem is that Turkey needs Israel, due to the latter's ties with Washington, more than Israel needs Turkey. This distorted approach has led Israel to spurn Turkey's efforts to sell it water or to increase the number of Turkish workers in the country. Israel has also refrained from proposing Turkish participation in major projects here, yet at the same time it seeks to participate in major projects in Turkey. This approach needs a shake-up, just as the Turkish prime minister's views on Israeli policy need correction."